

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3313

February 18, 2022

The Honorable Chiquita Brooks-LaSure
Administrator
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
Department of Health and Human Services
7500 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21244

Dear Administrator Brooks-LaSure,

I write to express my concern with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' (CMS) COVID-19 vaccine mandate for health care workers and its adverse impact on rural patients. While the COVID-19 pandemic has strained health care staff across the country, rural providers have been hit particularly hard.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare facilities in rural communities were already experiencing significant staff shortages. Rural patients have access to only 39.8 primary care providers per 100,000 people [compared](#)¹ to urban patients with 53.3 providers per 100,000. This disparity is well documented and leads to adverse health outcomes for rural patients.

After millions of dollars of investment and years of work, many North Carolina patients remain in underserved areas. Out of North Carolina's 100 counties, 87 are still [designated](#) as shortage areas for primary care, dental, and mental and behavioral health according to the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. I am concerned that the CMS vaccine mandate will further reduce the available medical professionals in rural communities and will continue to harm rural patients and reduce their access to life saving medical care.

Other states in the region, including Virginia and West Virginia, are facing similar challenges. That is why Governor Glenn Youngkin of Virginia and Governor Jim Justice of West Virginia wrote to CMS asking for a waiver of the vaccine mandate for rural hospitals facing staffing shortages. I urge you to grant the Governors' request and provide the same relief for rural health facilities in North Carolina and across the country.

¹ "About Rural Health Care." 2022. *NRHA*. <https://www.ruralhealth.us/about-nrha/about-rural-health-care>.

The heavy-handedness of the CMS mandate should not penalize patients seeking medical care. Unfortunately, this mandate does just that. Rural patients will be made to pay the price for this aggressive overreach from Washington, D.C. I urge you to reconsider your decision and allow greater flexibility in the interests of rural patients and providers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ted Budd". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ted" and last name "Budd" clearly distinguishable.

Ted Budd
Member of Congress